New Fiction

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done well enough to merit severe criticism.

He starts with a grandiose promise: a prologue in heaven, which owes a great deal more to Mr. Wells than to Job or Goethe. In fact, the inevitably suggested comparison to Wells's scene in "Joan and Peter" is fatally illuminative. This prelude deals with "God's Erasers——"

God looks o'er the world, a stupid, cluttered map with many billion eyes for dots, upstaring helter-skelter. The eyes are always bright to start with. Every morning the new ones are bright. Stillbirths don't count.

God has a rolltop desk, and in the pigeonholes erasers.

First He tries a brown one, Heritage. He rubs the helter-skelter map and weaker dots fade out. . . .

A soiled eraser, Poverty, sweeps the sheet. . . .

Down comes Crime, the red one, and eyes are smudged out that were not aimed at. Eruption, Famine, Disease, Pestilence, Drought. He tries them all at times.

Divine Impatience! A steel eraser, War. . . .

Believe it or not, there are still bright eyes remaining.

Bang goes the lid of the rolltop desk.

Let them live!

It is evidently a large order, and naturally one expects it to be filled in a large way. But instead we get two narrowly selective cases of highly specialized individuals, neither of whom is very essentially affected by environment or any of the cosmic eccentricities indicated by "God's erasers," except, in the girl's tragedy, by sheer accident. Each of these "movements" is for the most part effective as a unit case. The story of Lena is tense, brilliantly imagined, rising to real tragedy at times, and the companion picture of Samuel is a very lifelike figure. But neither is of cosmic significance. And there are not infrequent false notes, like the irrelevant "stillbirths" of the prologue.

The arrangement is antiphonal. First we get Samuel's story of his beginnings, then Lena's, then Samuel's trials and struggles, then Lena's tragic afflictions, and lastly a convergence of the two for the indicated "happy ending." The movements are well arranged and the final solution is not entirely mechanical.

Samuel is the son of a commonplace, lower middle class folk in a suburb of Boston, with a heritage of narrow religious intolerance and suburban banality. But he is a musical "prodigy," as a performer. (Neither he nor Lena are composers or creative musicians.) This talent lifts him out of his "heritage" and into the conservatory. Much of the early story is clever, livened with humor, though Mr. Paul often makes the mistake of endowing his boy with an adult's view of things instead of that of a real boy.

Lena is the daughter of a middle aged Jewish immigrant. It is a record of poverty, but she, too, is a musician and destined to be a wonderful violinist. The Boston Ghetto life is vividly drawn, but its folk rather idealized. Lena, of course, also enters the conservatory, she and Samuel fall in love, but equally, of course, the path of true love follows its well known habit of bumpiness. A brutal bit of pure accident maims Lena, breaking off her finger tips and thus ending the possibility of a career. The rest of the story runs true enough to statutory forms of romance, to a slightly artificial conclusion of happiness.

The style is, for the most part, fairly good, though it is often exasperatingly ejaculatory, with a wearisome staccato of exclamations. There is also a specious appearance of profundity in the underlying philosophy of the whole thing. But at least it is not commonplace or merely just another stock pattern novel. It has individuality and sometimes no small dramatic power. But its God is no more than a Semitic theater manager of Broadway magnitude.

THE EYES OF LOVE. By Corra Harris. George H. Doran Company.

MRS. HARRIS is one of that stimulating, magnetic type of writers who incite a reviewer to quarrel amicably with their methods and materials even while cordially admitting his enjoyment. A novel from her pen suggests a room with many charming and artistic furnishings, each of which taken singly is an enviable possession but which jointly produce an effect of overcrowding. Her characters are more than portraits; they are intimate revelations. Her digressions are pleasant interludes and never intrusions. Yet the net result is to leave the reader a little uncertain as to which of the varied threads of her story is the dominant one; in short, out of a multitude of worth while things that she always manages to say, which particular one would best sum up the motif of the book?

In "The Eyes of Love," for instance, the over emphasis of a half dozen themes—or rather, the under emphasis of any particular one of them—makes it surprisingly difficult to epitomize effectively what on its surface is a story told with rare skill and understanding. Yet the moment that you seize upon a certain point of departure you realize that it is the wrong one; the emphasis belongs, not there, but somewhere else. Mr. Puckle, leading lawyer in the old Southern city of Millidge, is not the first middle aged gentleman of settled habits who ever lost his head and his heart at the first sight of such a radiant vision as Betty Marshall when she chanced to visit his old friends, the Crombies. But although his foredoomed disappointment is turned into a life long and worshipful devotion, it is by no means the dominant note of the book, even though the author has given him the opening scene and the closing speech. Neither is this a "Main Street" type of book, even though a score or more of characters are drawn in with generous detail and indulgent irony, who for the most part serve little purpose in the story beyond emphasizing the self centered individuality of Millidge. In turning to Windham Cutmore, masterful blend of modern aggressiveness and old time knighthood, one feels on surer ground. Cutmore has a secret war record of limitless dramatic possibilities—a theme, in short, for a new "Charge of the Light Brigade." Some one had blundered; on the very hour when a general retreat had been ordered Cutmore was sent out with a detail to locate a certain point in the German line. Three days later, with a turn in the tide of war, he was found in a "pit of horrors," with shattered bones; moreover, he had been gassed. The other seven men had disappeared. Hayden, the officer who had blundered, denied sending out the detail; and only his wounds saved Cutmore from court-martial. He was invalided home, slowly recuperated, and when Betty Marshall's loveliness took him by storm he was outwardly the same debonair self assured, irrepressible Windham Cutmore as of old. One foresees that when Fate eventually plays the grim jest of bringing Cutmore and his blundering superior officer face to face something tragic will happen. And yet even this is not the central story that Mrs. Harris has set out to tell—it is at most merely a link in it, not the weakest link, to be sure, but only a link, all the same.

Perhaps the best way of summing up the real essence of "The Eyes of Love" is to let the author do it herself, through just one quotation from Chapter VIII.:

Few women are ever related by marriage to the minds of their husbands. These minds are foreign countries where they discover themselves to be aliens, speaking another smaller language and practically incapable of mastering the manners and customs of that place. This is sometimes the man's fault, because his mind is not a fit place for a nice person like his wife to dwell, but more frequently it is the wife's fault, who is not willing to associate intimately with the hardships that inhabit the mind of a busy man, who has no time to ornament that area with ideas pertaining to the finer things.

The marriage of Windham Cutmore and Betty Marshall started out to be this sort of marriage; but it grew into something very different, something very fine and rare, because Betty happened to have a mind and a will of her own, studied and analyzed her husband, discovered many disillusioning facts, and with feminine illogic loved him all the better for her disillusion. The book, in short, while chameleon-like in the many colors it takes on, is fundamentally a study of wedded happiness of a rare and beautiful sort achieved in the face of a formidable divergence of habits, interests and ideals. Perhaps the author felt that she had created a situation too perfect to last. Yet even so, there seems small excuse for the unpreparedness of the closing tragedy, which has about it no element of the inevitable, such as is rightly demanded in a so-called "unpleasant ending." As for the whole hectic episode of Hayden, the ex-captain who blundered, while one quite sympathizes with Cutmore's very human resentment, it is difficult to share the author's admiration of her hero as a knight born out of time, both when he nearly killed Hayden and when, later, for Betty's sake, he resists completing the job. The old knightly standard was "not to reason why," but merely "to do and die," when some one had blundered. But this does not alter the fact that "The Eyes of Love" is a book to be grateful for, and that the character of Puckle is an abiding joy.

FREDERIC TABER COOPER.

THE HOUSE OF SOULS. By Arthur Machen. Alfred A. Knopf.

WHEN Mrs. Nixon, in Arthur Machen's "The House of Souls," related to her niece Mary Darnell, the story of the indications of her aged husband's alleged infidelity the climax came with the dandelion incident. On that occasion, walking in the country with her husband, Mrs. Nixon noticed a mysterious whistle that followed them. Finally, after she had climbed over a stile she turned round and her husband had vanished. Panic-stricken, she called his name, and presently he reappeared with the nonchalant explanation that there were some flowers he could never pass. When Mrs. Nixon saw that he carried merely a dandelion "she felt as if her head were going round," and both Mary and Mary's husband were equally astounded when she related it.

From this attitude one would acutely infer that Mr. Machen is not an American. In our suburban and rural society the dandelion is no longer a common weed but an ardently awaited means to an end, and any American would be likely to desert his wife momentarily at the momentous appearance of the first dandelion of the year, or, more practically, to bid her order the yeast cake and the brown sugar while he gathered in the herb before some thirsty competitor had gleaned the field.

In Mr. Machen's stories, laid in unvolsteadized England, many common things are made to assume an uncommon significance, but a dandelion by the river's brim is to him merely a simple dandelion. In fact, in this case, the whole dandelion incident proved to be only a figment of Mrs. Nixon's disordered brain—a blind trail, as it were, rather than a blind tiger. To the average reader it is not the only blind trail in the volume, for the author's method is likely to be ambulatory.

Mr. Machen seems concerned principally with his mysterious backgrounds of faery or diabolism. Unfortunately he seems less at ease in the realm of faery than Mr. Chesterton or Mr. Barrie, and comparatively a stranger beside Mr. James Stephens or Lord Dunsany. He does not trouble to give the reader any particularly sympathetic characters to accompany him along the strange by-paths he loves, and in fact the only persons he depicts clearly in the four tales that make up his volume are the city clerk Darnell and his wife, who are priggishly discouraging. Finally, he refines his atmosphere to the point of attenuation.

In the third story, however, "The Great God Pan," Mr. Machen has achieved a thriller which should be calculated to make any one's hair stand on end. Here he employs most effectively the somewhat involved structure habitual to his method, and the result is a succession of climactic strokes of horror.

HAROLD KELLOCK.

JIMINY. By Gilbert W. Gabriel. George H. Doran Company.

IT should be noted at the outset and remembered as one reads this book that Mr. Gabriel is first of all a poet, a delicate dreamer of dreams and seer of visions. But here he has clothed them tangibly and given them a body solid enough not merely to be seen clearly, but to enable these elemental folk from a true fairyland to perform charmingly upon a definitely everyday stage. They never lose their glamour, but it is always a cloak, a gorgeous garment to cover human realities. He even manages to bring them down to earth with something of a bump, for a serio-comic, adventurous bit of melodrama, interpolated just before the last scene, an *allegretto* movement to precede the softened *adagio* of the end. And the book is also shot through with a subtle humor, which sometimes sharpens to mordancy, in an occasional aside, reminding one that Mr. Gabriel is also highly proficient in other literary fields than the fanciful. The whole thing is a very adroit performance.

The stodgily matter of fact reader might as well be warned off; this is no book for the unimaginative, for the unfortunate person who can see in the rainbow no more than a fact of nature of some interest to the scientist and pretty enough to look at, but with no further suggestiveness. It is not even for the reader who is capable of thinking of the pot of gold at the rainbow's foot. Its treasure is not so crassly material as that. Indeed, one may quote from the verses of no less a person than Jennie Raftery Reni, the Jiminy of the book, which precede the chapters:

Where the rainbow pours its bold
Colors to the promised earth,
You shall find no crock of gold—
Only this: the glowing birth
Of some newer rainbow, fleeing
Past the realms of all your seeing!

The story follows the rainbow to precisely that very happy ending. But Jiminy, or more sedately, Miss Jennie Raftery, and later on Mrs. Benjamin Benvenuto Reni, and Benjamin himself are really quite everyday folk when you look at them soberly. Jennie was a school teacher in an East Side public school, and Benjamin had been a newspaper hack artist until the war gathered him in. The story opens with his return and demobilization, followed at once by his marriage, which is itself performed in a sufficiently romantic fashion in a White Mountain village, leading to a rapturous honeymoon in a hillside bungalow. Thus far it is chiefly the familiar path of young love, happily reckless in its poverty of all things save love and faith in love as all sufficient. Jennie is a poetess (a real one, too, as the samples of her verse demonstrate), and Benjamin is an artist, who aspires to paint some day like Raphael, and they are very much in love and married—enough, one might think, to equip a romance.

But they dream of more, for they aspire to find the lost sonnets of Raphael, the sonnets written exclusively for la Fornarina, which, as the erudite and trustworthy historian Robert Browning records in measured cadences, vanished some four centuries ago. The quest becomes something more than a symbolic affair; it grows to an obsession, gaining steadily in concreteness and carrying the reader along with increasing eagerness and belief in their solid existence, so that when the time and curse stained parchment actually does turn up it is a magically natural result. But the wizardry of the telling evaporates in any attempt to summarize.

Neither can a reviewer give any correct impression of the clever use of even the grotesque (as in Mr. Wimple's rescue of the book from the pile of soiled linen) or the apt engineering of the extravaganza elements in the story, such as the masquerade of Sancho, the "butler" in a fancy dress costume, impersonating the Italian Minister of Fine Arts, or of the gigantic Mr. Daniel Arimondo, book seller and magnate, or of the necessary makebelieve involved in bringing together descendants of Guido Reni and of the Fornarina's disreputable family in modern New York. But these strange folk are indisputably there. As Jiminy herself sees it:

Forty-something street, as they traversed it, was unbelievably inhatited by figures from the omnipresent romance; trousers and skirts of passing sobriety became for them a spectacle of doublet and hose, of bodices, jewels in profusion and all the brave colors of the Renaissance. . . . Shops were bazaars of merchants from Genoa and Venice. Office buildings dazzled into palaces. It was become a street of Raphael's Rome. . . .

It is truly unbelievable, both the shimmer of the dream and the reek of garlic from the sink in Julia's

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